

Obituary

LIONEL ERNEST HOWARD WHITBY, Kt.,
C.V.O., M.C., M.A., M.D., F.R.C.P., Hon.D.Sc.(Toronto),
Hon.LL.D.(Glasg.), Hon.M.D.(Louvain), D.P.H.

THE facilities provided today by the National Blood Transfusion Service make it difficult to appreciate the trouble a transfusion entailed less than twenty-five years ago. Probably the greatest single factor responsible for the change was the Army Transfusion Service, developed during the last war.

The inspiration and organizing genius behind this pioneer service, which has been taken as a pattern by so many others since, was Brigadier Sir Lionel Whitby, whose death occurred on November 24th, 1956, after an operation, at the age of 61. By his death the Army has lost one of its most eminent Honorary Consultants and a staunch friend.

Lionel Ernest Howard Whitby was born on May 8th, 1895, and was educated at Bromsgrove School and Downing College, Cambridge. He had won an open scholarship but before taking it up, joined the Royal Fusiliers on the outbreak of the First World War. The following year he was commissioned in the Royal West Kent Regiment and in 1917 was awarded the M.C. for gallantry at Passchendaele. In 1918, when a machine-gun officer with the rank of Major, he was severely wounded and had a leg amputated near the hip. After his recovery he studied medicine at Cambridge and at the Middlesex Hospital where he was a scholar and a prizeman, qualifying in 1923. The way in which he mastered his grave physical handicap at this time will long remain an inspiration to others. Adapting his career to suit his disability, he was appointed Assistant Pathologist in the Bland Sutton Institute of Pathology and soon came to be recognized as one of the leading clinical pathologists in London. He was among those who attended King George V in 1929.

Although much in demand as a consultant, he found time at this period for teaching and research and wrote a number of well-known textbooks including *Medical Bacteriology* (1928) and (jointly with Dr. C. J. C. Britton) the volume "that elevated hæmatology from a superstition to a science"—*Disorders of the Blood* (1935). In 1936, Whitby was quick to realize the potentialities of the sulphonamide drugs and was able to establish on a firm basis, the efficacy of sulphapyridine in the treatment of pneumococcal pneumonia and the importance of continuous therapy.

At the outbreak of the Second World War, Whitby, then a Colonel in the Territorial Army, was invited to organize the Transfusion Service for the British Army and he established its headquarters at the Army Blood Supply Depot at Bristol. This was to provide blood and blood derivatives such as dried and wet plasma and transfusion equipment to the forces at home and overseas and to train officers and men in transfusion duties. He undertook this task with characteristic energy and resource and accomplished it with conspicuous success. He gathered around him a team of workers whom he fired with his enthusiasm and whose efforts he directed with great efficiency and tact. The



THE LATE SIR LIONEL WHITBY, C.V.O., M.C.

Army Blood Supply Depot was a complex unit comprising R.A.M.C., R.A.S.C., R.E., A.T.S., V.A.D., F.A.N.Y., and British Red Cross and St. John Ambulance personnel. These he welded into a most efficient and happy whole. Members of the Army Transfusion Service took an immense pride in their allegiance to Whitby and regarded themselves first and foremost as "Whitby's men."

Whitby realized at once the value of the pioneer work of Greaves at Cambridge on the freeze-drying of plasma and serum and a large plant was set up near Bristol to dry plasma for the Army. He also saw that the supply of a vital fluid such as blood required its own distribution organization in the field, with trained men to handle transfusion supplies at all levels. The development of the Base and Field Transfusion Units was the result, and he worked out the details of personnel and equipment which have stood the test of time.

In addition to the productive side of the work, he directed research on the optimal treatment of plasma for long storage and perfected the organization of bleeding teams for the mass collection of blood. His achievement in this field was summed up in the *History of the Second World War—Surgery* (1953), "One outstanding reason for the greatly improved results of treatment of casualties in the war of 1939-45 was the fact that the restoration of the general condition of the wounded man was made possible by the ready availability of blood (or its derivatives) which could be transferred into the circulation of the patient."

In 1945 he became Regius Professor of Physic in the University of Cambridge. Two years later, he was elected to the mastership of Downing College and from 1951 to 1953 he was Vice-Chancellor of the University.

Sir Lionel Whitby was a man of endearing charm with a delightful and impish sense of humour. His unaffected manner, unchanged by the honours which came to him, and his cordial friendliness, soon put people at their ease. His mind was orderly and intensely practical and he was able quickly to strip a problem to its essentials. This made him an excellent teacher, author and counsellor, and an invaluable member of any committee on which he served. No matter how great the responsibilities he carried or how busy he was, he always appeared cheerful and unruffled and glad to attend to the many problems brought to him by his colleagues.

With these qualities, and his attainments as a physician and pathologist, it was inevitable that he should become an international figure in medicine, and he was much sought after as a visiting professor and lecturer and as an officer of international societies and other bodies.

Although primarily a clinical pathologist, Whitby was always proud of the uniform he wore and set a high example of soldierly bearing and immaculate turn-out and indeed it has been well said that he was "the complete Army doctor." After the war he maintained the happiest associations with the Army Medical Department as Honorary Consultant in Hæmatology, and undertook advanced training of specialists in this branch.

We extend our deep sympathy to Lady Whitby, who as a Major in the R.A.M.C. had worked hard by her husband's side and to their children, one of whom is serving in the Corps today.